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**DO CHILDREN REPEAT CLASSES ?**

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This version of the report of the "Characteristics of the School Age-Population.\* The Incidence of Repetition Among Enrolled Primary School Children," is intended for the primary school teacher, parents and guardians and citizens who are interested in the problem facing Primary Education. The report is therefore free from all statistical and research jargon and it is written in such a way that the reader is made aware of the problem.

Educational Research for the purpose of simplicity is the scientific approach to problem solving. It is an objective method to the study of a phenomenon that is problematic. In this edition, we will be examining the phenomenon of repetition in the primary schools. The whole process of educational research itself has many problems especially that of executing research activities in the African context. After going through numerous obstacles, the researcher is still faced with the final problem of dissemination. This problem of dissemination was succinctly stated by our Director in his welcome address at the Anglophone West African Educational Research Conference held at Cape Sierra in June, 1976 where he says:

"The dissemination and utilization of research results are indispensable components of the research process. It is important therefore that the result of research activities should be made available to the various levels of the education community and

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in a language and presentation conducive to their being easily understood and effectively utilized. This could best be achieved by increased communication between researchers and practioners. It is equally vital that there should be more effective articulation between decision - making and on - going research."

Valuable and relevant research has been conducted in Sierra Leone, but they too often end up on dusty shelves too technical and or too bulky to attract the average reader or administrator. To this end, a narrative report is thus presented to our readers to elucidate the crucial problem of repetition in the primary schools.

Do children repeat classes? The simple and unequivocal answer to this question is 'yes.' In 1977/78, the Planning Unit of the Ministry of Education and the Research Division of the Institute of Education collaboratively analyzed enrolment returns from both primary and secondary schools. Some of the data have since been re-organized and examined so that they are comparable with our survey data. In early 1981, information was collected pertaining to the educational, economic and social aspects of our school-age children in the Western Area, Bo, Pujehun and Koinadugu Districts. Bo and the Western Area represented areas with High Primary School Enrolment and Koinadugu and the Pujehun Districts represented areas with Low Primary School Enrolment. As a result of this definition, all further discussion on repetition will be referring to High and Low Primary School Enrolment Area.

The findings of the 1977/78 showed that of children in the Low Enrolment Area, about 23 percent (i.e. 23 out of every 100 children), of the boys and 29 percent of the girls repeated class I, comparatively, 16 percent boys and 17 percent girls repeated Class I

in the High Enrolment Area. Repetition was highest in class I and gradually declined to class 7. Taking the children in Low Enrolment Area for that year, 16 percent of the boys repeated a class for that year, compared to 20 percent of the girls. For children in the High Enrolment Area, about 13 percent of the boys and 14 percent of the girls repeated a class that year. The data also showed that boys had a higher rate of repetition than girls.

In the survey of these four areas in 1981 it was also discovered that repetition was still prevalent, and more so in the first grade. The observed rates of repetition for class I were much more higher than the rates reported in the 1977/78 data. There are two possible explanations to this:-

One is that probably the rate of repetition has increased over the three years, or that the difference in the two rates could be attributed to the under-reporting of repetition, in school-returns where pupils who drop-out from school present themselves as new entrants or promotees in another school.

Using class I again as an example, about 57 percent of boys and girls of both Enrolment Areas were promoted to class II, 34 percent of the boys and about 40 percent of the girls in the High Enrolment Area repeated class I once, 6 percent of the boys and 4 percent of the girls repeated class I twice, and about 3 percent of the boys in the High Enrolment Area spent over three years in class I. In the Low Enrolment Area, 33 percent of the boys and 36 percent of the girls spent two years in class I, 3 percent of the boys spent 3 years and another 3 percent of the boys spent over 3 years in class I. These high rates of repetition are persistent throughout all the classes in both the enrolment areas. These

findings are not encouraging especially at a time when the Ministry of Education through the Third I.D.A. Education Project is implementing a programme of primary school expansion. Class I is being used as an illustration here, because it is firmly believed that unless the problem of social, linguistic, psychological and academic adjustments of these beginners are tackled the problem of repetition and ultimately drop-out will continue in our primary cycle. It is also not the intention to bore readers by merely recording a series of percentages as details of the other classes can be found in the full report.

It was possible to calculate a crude estimate of the number of years it takes the child to attain each class. The major conclusion of this finding, is that it takes over the prescribed time to attain each class in the primary cycle. For example, it takes about 1.5 years for the average child to move from class I to class II. Such a finding has serious cost implications as quite a large sum of the school budget is being absorbed by children repeating classes. In addition to the cost, access to schooling is reduced for children who are seeking entrance into the system. This high percentage of wastage, in this instance repetition, indicates serious weaknesses in the functioning of the educational system.

To bring the problem closer home, a school was visited about three hundred yards away from the Institute and within a 2 mile radius from the Ministry of Education. This simple presentation shown below illustrates the number of children repeating a class in that school in the 1980/81 academic year, the same year the survey data was collected. The single tabulation clearly shows the problem, especially in the lower classes. In a school of 540 children 90 of them or 17 percent were repeaters!

Presenting this 'case' has obviously violated the rules and regulations governing sampling and other research methods. But this single presentation is being used to give some reality to the previous discussions on the Low and High Enrolment Areas and to further reinforce that one does not necessarily have to travel too far to observe this phenomenon of repetition in the primary schools. It is thus the intention of this report to get policy makers, administrators, headteachers, teachers, parents and guardians, and the community in general to be thinking of ways and means to arrest this problem of repetition in our schools.

<u>Class</u>	<u>Number of pupils Repeating</u>	<u>Total of pupils in class</u>	<u>Percentage of pupils Repeating</u>
3A	15	49	30.6
3B	16	48	33.3
4A	1	46	2.2
4B	12	46	26.1
4C	10	35	28.6
5A	3	44	6.8
5B	5	41	12.2
5C	11	37	29.7
6A	5	46	10.9
6B	1	44	2.3
6C	11	36	30.6
7A	0	33	0.0
7B	0	35	0.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>16.7</b>

As a start, alternative programmes already in existence could be of valuable contribution. Unfortunately, the Bunumbu Project areas did not fall within the areas that were visited during the survey. The results from this project area would have revealed the extent to which the Bunumbu experience which is an alternative to the present primary curriculum has reduced this problem of repetition which is so prevalent in other areas. This therefore calls for a study on the internal efficiency of the Bunumbu Project and similarly of the Pilot School using the local language Programme.

Having established the fact that children do repeat classes in the primary schools, further investigation is therefore needed to ascertain:

- 1) The causes of repetition -  
Why do children repeat?
- 2) Why is repetition highest between classes I and II?  
In such a study it would be interesting to examine the extent to which the use of the mother tongue as a means of instruction is related to repetition and retention.
- 3) A detailed study on the effects of repetition on achievement.
- 4) Whether the incidence of repetition exhibited in this report is also experienced in other institutions of learning such as the Teacher Training Colleges, the University and the Technical Institutions.

After a careful study of the report and perhaps using the results of the recommended studies;

1. The Ministry of Education should state precisely whether or not repetition should be permitted.

If repetition is allowed -

(1) The number of times the child is allowed to repeat a class.

(2) The number of times a child is permitted to repeat in the primary cycle.

2. Considering the increase in the school budget due to repetition, the Ministry of Education should review the objectives of each class especially the core subjects - Mathematics, English Language and the Sciences. In so doing, the Ministry can ascertain the degree to which these objectives are being met in each class.
3. The Ministry should delegate the responsibility of developing achievement tests for each class to the Institute of Education. These tests would be used for diagnostic and assessment purposes. This is considered necessary as the results of these tests will reveal areas where both children and teachers are lacking. This national testing is currently being achieved by the Selective Entrance Examination which is administered at the end of the primary cycle. Poor performance of pupils is no strange information to the Ministry. If similar testing was done throughout the primary cycle, then a quality control system could be built in to improve areas where the children have difficulty in comprehending and/or alternatively where the teachers fall short in their teaching. These tests could be initially administered to a sample of schools and a sample of classes to cut down on the administrative and supervisory work load.



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